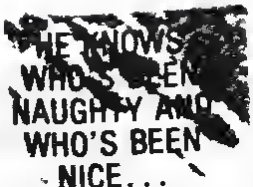
HERB SCHRADER'S

VIDEO DRIVE-IN!



5.

Christmas, a joyous time when people's thoughts turn to Santa, snow, and Jesus. Christmas, a festive time when unoriginal screenwriters thoughts turn to bloody slashings.....

If you consider, (and rightly so) that slasher films are a sub genre of the horror film, and holiday slashers {the HALLOWEEN's, NEW YEAR'S EVIL, MY BLOODY VALENTINE, et al.} a sub genre of that, you can logically assume that Christmas slashers are a sub-genre of a sub-genre of a sub-genre.

Five of these third generational gorefests come to mind.

A White Christmas Eve, amid a sorority house serves as an atmospheric setting for a series of murders in BLACK CHRISTMAS, directed by Bob Clark, an excellent horror film director who now makes Hollywood big-budget fare like RHINESTONE. His string of early seventies horror includes, CHILDREN SHOULDN'T PLAY WITH DEAD THINGS, DERANGED, and DEATHDREAM (last shown in Columbus as IT CAME FROM THE GRAVE). All sure to be considered low-budget classics.

Everyone has a cause to fight for, and at Christmas time in 1984, normally stoical housewives interupted their Christmas shopping to face the harsh winter winds in an effort to ban SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT. Seeing the shrieking civil protectors, picketing theatres on nightly national news was the best Christmas present any exploitationist could hope for. Neither on video nor in the theatres, the FRIDAY THE 13th style-story of young Billy seeing his parents get slaughtered by a Santa thug, then going on a rampage 18 years later after having to fill in for an absent store Santa went over pretty well with myself.

The following three are available on video:

CHRISTMAS EVIL (1983)
Prod: Edward Prebbman

Written and Directed by:
Lewis Jackson
Starring: Brandon Maggart

Christmas Eve. A family sits anxiously on the stairs. Suddenly, a familiar pair of black boots jut from the fireplace. It's Santa!

Welcome to CHRISTMAS EVIL, a slashingly cheerful, seethingly upbeat, stalker movie.

What, with its lead character's unfounded, fanatical belief in Santa Claus, its niggardly, 'enjoy Christmas or die' attitude and its astonishing off the wall ending, its no wonder this flatly directed Lewis Jackson film, also known as YOU BETTER WATCH OUT, languishes in obscurity.

Later that night, with the boys tucked in bed, Santa (it's only dad) and mom take the quiet time to engage in aome festive oral interplay. Awakened by the downstairs groping, little Harry investigates. Brainsick from the sight, he dashes upstairs to the attic, grabs an ornament and slashes his hand.

Present Day.....
Middle aged and mentally unstable, Harry harbors a bizarre love for Santa, and an equally bizarre hate for sex. The sight of a local brat perusing PENTHOUSE so exasperates Harry that he feverishly notates the incident, "negative body hygiene," in his sick diary, "Bad Boys and Girls."

Some people think they are Jesus Christ. Harry thinks he's Santa!

A new promotion to line supervisor at Jolly Dream, a local toy factory, (here Harry can "play" Santa and watch over his "elves") stirs resentment in his co-workers....and more dangerously, stress in Harry. At home, after overhearing an obnoxious, sandwich chewing, unionite call him a "schmuck" he frantically, SMUT PEDDLER like, fondles and decapitates a Barbie doll.

Losing grip, the would be Santa fashions himself a customized Santa suit and then, TAXI DRIVER like, admires it in the mirror. A real Christmas fanatic, Harry decorates

his apartment with hundreds of miniature Santa statuettes; he never misses a televised parade featuring the Jolly One.

Living life on a teetering brink ends as Harry snaps into oblivious insanity. The reason? Jolly Dream executives had lied about donating toys to a local Children's Hospital.

The metamorphosis is complete! HARRY IS SANTA!

Peeling out in his modern sled, a white van with a red Santa-style, present packed sleigh painted on each side, donning his red and whites, Harry heads for Jolly Dream. He intends to follow through on what the executives only promised; donate some toys. Obviously inspired by ROBIN HOOD, the modern Santa packs his "sleigh" with the pilfered toys, drives to the hospital then delivers them to a gracious medical staff.

In the film's only flurry of violence, (thus making it much more effective than usual) Santa stops to greet some home bound Christmas Eve parishioners but finds them to be boorish, hippocritical Wm. Buckley types. Outraged, the fascist Santa plunges a toy sword through one particularly overbearing yuppie's eye. Panic ensues while the former Harry hacks a few more upward mobiles in the face and neck.

The spree continues and as usual, (it doesn't make any difference that he drives around in such a unique van) the bungling cinema cops can't put together any clues.

By now the local TV news is warning the citizens to avoid and report anyone dressed as Santa. The desperate police round up all the street Santas and make them appear in a line up for the eyewitnesses. Panic grips a city!

Santa meanwhile gets stuck in a chimney, kills the brash unionite and shows up on his brother's doorstep. He admits to not being a good example of an older brother and spills the real reason of the slayings: "they rejected my cheer."

The two brothers fight but Harry wins and drives off.

Ending with the most groan inducing finale I've seen, this modern day story of how Santa came to be is guaranteed to ruin your Christmas spirit.

DON'T OPEN TILL CHRISTMAS (1983)
Prod: DICK RANDALL and STEVE MINASIAN
Dir : EDWARD PURDOM
With: EDWARD PURDOM
CAROLINE MUNRO
BELINDA MAYNE

Of all the low budget horror movie producer/promoters throughout the years, no one has been more consistant, original and innovative than Steve Minasian.

Successes with legendary promotions like the MARK OF THE DEVIL vomit bag, the classic "To avoid fainting, keep repeating, it's only a movie," tag line attached to LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT, DON'T LOOK IN THE BASEMENT, DON'T OPEN THE WINDOW, TWITCH OF THE DEATH

This VOMIT BAG and the PRICE of one ADMISSION will enable YOU to SEE...
the first film "R" rated V for violence
mark of the devil
POSITIVELY THE MOST HORRIFYING FILM EVER MADE
SEE IT SOON AT A THEATRE NEAR YOU

NERVE (on video as: EAT OF BLOOD) and APARTMENT ON THE 13th FLOOR advertisements, and the profitable FRIDAY THE 13th series, are well known. But the one thing that separates Steve Minasian from his fellow exploitation hacks is that his movies deliver exactly what the ads promise.

Through the years that I have attended exploitation flicks, only 4 times have I witnessed patrons leave the auditorium because of cinematic depravity. The first time was during MARK OF THE DEVIL (a so called a lost film, but sure to turn up on video one day.)

Don't Open Till
STARRING: EDMUND PUROOM
CAROLINE MUNRO • BELINDA MAYNE • GERRY SUNDQUIST
MARK JONES • KEVIN LLOYD • ROBIN PARKINSON • Written by DEREK FORD
Produced by DICK RANDALL & STEVE MINASIAN • Directed by EDMUND PURDOM

Quite audibly uneasy, three moviegoers squirmed throughout its running time until the toungue extraction scene. They gasped then galloped out the door. The next time was LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT: the "piss your pants scene." THE EXORCIST followed that, (my mom had to actually sign a waiver before the theatre would lst me in!) I think it was just the language in general, not any particular scene that forced the fainthearted out. And finally, once again, Minasian's gut churning gorefest, PIECES sent people scurrying.

It's no wonder then, why I looked forward to the video release of the newest of the DON'T movies, DON'T OPEN TILL CHRISTMAS.

So why is DON'T OPEN TILL CHRISTMAS such a flop?

First off, it's boring. All the action is heaped in the beginning and, to a lesser extent, the end. Nothing, absolutely nothing happens in the middle. Second, it contains micro-gore. It doesn't make sense to film a gore movie, then, for the sake of an R rating, cut out all the gore. What else is there? Third, it was filmed and it shows, in the disco age. Fourth, it features Caroline Munro as herself! A better model than an actress, she's just a pretty face with no talent. Fifth, there is absolutely no humor to be found, come to think of it though, I can't recall much humor in ANY Steve Minasian flick. And sixth, its all been done before, and better, by the same man.

It starts out with the really original premise of SEX = DEATH.

A couple make out in a car, ignoring all warning signs of the approaching slasher. Its called the deserved to die syndrome. Disco music thumps as the killer vents his anger on street Santa Clauses. One gets a spear through the throat, another gets his face fried in some hot coals. "It was the costume he was wearing," says astute police detective, Ian Paris (Edward Purdom : graduate of the Bela Lugosi School of Role Discernment) of the motive. Asks his bright assistant, "Do you think sir, we have a psychopath on our hands?" Another Santa gets shot in the head. The rushed Ed (he's put his coat on and left every scene so far) is concerned.

Enter the suspicious Giles of the "Daily News," Sharon, a porno model and (Marilyn Chambers look a like) Kate (Belinda Mayne.)

Later, at a photo session, Kate screams, "You insensitive bastards!" to the photographer who asked her to pose nude with a Santa. It turns out that Kate's dad was killed by a slasher, while wearing a Santa suit.

Back to the stalker. Not believing in equal opportunity, he passes up a chance to slash a busty, beautiful female Santa. Instead, he makes his way to a local disco where we see: a knife in a foot, a kick to the groin, some punches to the face, and a drippy eye. After the massacre, the police gst only one description of the killer: his eyes "smiled."

Enter Caroline Munro in an embarrassing cameo as herself--a disco singer! In a recent FANGORIA interview, she seemed resigned to the fact that the only parts offered to her nowadays are in cheap slasher movies. Lets hope she only acts, not sings in any future endeavors.

The ludicrous motive to tbe killings, once again, is the fact that years ago, an impressionable youngster comes home and catches Santa (Ed Purdom) and mommy in sexual embrace, thus apparently ruining is image of mommy, Santa and society as a whole.

By the way, DON'T OPEN TILL CHRISTMAS refers to a gift given at the beginning of the movie.

TO ALL A GOODNIGHT
Prod: JAY RASUMNY
Dir : DAVID HESS
Scr : ALEX REBAR
With: JENNIFER RUNYON
LINDA GENTILE
FORREST SWANSON
JUDITH BRIDGES
JUDY HESS

Calvin Finishing School For Girls....Christmas 2 years ago. A student accidently leaves a present while she and her sister students pack up to leave for Christmas Break. Annoyed at the wait, Dad starts bitching about tuition costs, and I'm regretfully thinking, "this sure looks an awful lot like GIRLS NITE OUT."

TO AVOID FAINTING KEEP REPEATING, IT'S ONLY A MOVIE ..ONLY A MOVIE ..ONLY A MOVIE ..ONLY A MOVIE ..ONLY A MOVIE ..ONLY A MOVIE

Let's put it this way, this "movie" (released by Media, a once great company that released TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE, MANIAC, Andy Warhol's HEAT, BLOODSUCKING FREAKS, and SLAVES OF LOVE, recently balked at releasing a series of John Waters movies because of company image) stinks.

A natural curiousity about this Intercontinental Film release arises due to the fact that cinema-schizo David (LAST HOUSE ON THE LEFT, THE HOUSE ON THE EDGE OF THE PARK) Hess directed it.

A classic cinema creep he is, a director he isn't. The Hess style of direction, "Let's get it done with, I'm hungry." presents a lack of even scant attention to detail. Awkwardness looms in every aspect of this amateur Sandy Cobe presentation.

THE MENU: Lots of promiscuous .....latter teens.

THE COOK: Mrs. Jensen

The remaining girls are called to dinner. Cut to cliche footage of the stalker's gloved hands Xing out the names tonights stalkees.

The stereotyped gals range from snotty, "Is somebody going to tell us something, or are we just going to sit here til we start laying eggs?" to horny, "Somethings going to get LAID," to flirting, "What time are they COMING?" In fact, if there is anything memorable about this movie, its the incredible amount of stupid sexual double-entendres written into the meager SEX = DEATH script.

As soon as Cynthia (in at least 75% of these slasher flicks, a CYNthia is cast as one of the more promiscuous of the stalkees; its a true benchmark of creative unoriginality) shows some skin, the slashing begins.

A product of the "let's make a gore movie then cut out the gore for distribution's sake," school, the blood is minimally shown in quick asides. And as usual, all the familiar trappings of the stalker movie get rehashed for yet 90 more minutes.

Mix these ingredients for a generic slasher flick.....

The Deserve to Die Syndrome takes effect when Nancy, sweet young thing, suspects foul play after the first murder, but is laughed at and ignored by her peers.

The Man You Don't Want To Know is introduced in the form of ugly Ralph, the eerie gardener. The girls describe him as, "A gargoyle on the southside of Notre Dame."

A Real Suspect enters: Tina! Three times married, three husbands dead. Her talk (of "butchers and leftovers") centers on the morbid. Of her husbands, "After the 3rd one, its just a piece of cake."

The Sexually Inclined (thus doomed) Trisha. Her fatal mistake comes when she unknowingly, "Tom will you stop messing around and seduce me like a man." seduces the killer.

The Plotting Lea. She coaxes Nancy to deliver drugged milk to Mrs. Jensen. A deadly mistake.

The movie drones on for a bit until Tom gets concerned about the missing girls. His search (and life) ends with a boulder to the head.

By now every body left is in

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bed with somebody, the random sex murderer prowls with glee, the movie is 3/4's the way over, and I can't detect any storyline in this garbled mess.

Things round their way to the obligitory "body count scene," where the remaining characters stumble upon the gruesome remains. Scared, they decide to fight back.

The flurry of gore includes decapitations, axe chops to the face, hanging by wire, body dicing via propellor blades, and stabbings. Hess shows his Hitchcock sensitivities with lots of 'shadow holding the knife shots.'

An unforgotten prankish fall by Jensen's daughter from a balcony years ago at the school turns out to be the flimsy motive of the killings. A final confrontation between the manic Mrs. Jensen, "You gave her [Jensen's daugher] drugs," and Sweet Nancy culminates with Mrs. Jensen plunging, ironically, over the same balcony to her death.

But wait! The killer's still alive! Still stalking! Who is it???

Till next time, bye-bye.

Director ??
Hess

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